

National Renaissance

NATIONAL Renaissance is a formula by which the thinking Chinese today hope to save China. The problem of national salvation is an old one. China has tried many other cures before she comes to the present one. And in order to get a proper prospective of the problem and see the present-day slogan in its proper light, it would be necessary to review the various cures that have been prescribed before this one.

The defeat China suffered at the hands of the British in the Opium War was not sufficiently humiliating to wake up the Chinese government or people to the danger confronting them. It was the Taiping Rebellion which demonstrated the utter unreliability of the government troops, and the allied expedition of the British and the French, which captured not only Canton, but also both Tientsin and Peking that aroused the Chinese officials from their lethargy. They then realized that they must do something or perish. That was in the 'fifties, and when the Taiping Rebellion was put down, the Chinese generals who liquidated the situation saw the danger that China was facing, and they saw national salvation in what is loosely termed *yang wu* (洋務). The chief exponents of *yang wu* were Tseng Kuo-fan, Tso Tsung-t'ang and Li Hung-chung, Li being the best known to westerners. For fully three decades ending with the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95 the *yang wu* advocates completely dominated the scene. It was not a well defined policy, but stood generally for the introduction of certain things from the West as well as an understanding of the West, so as to know how to deal with the westerners. Among the things these Chinese scholar-general-statesmen wished to see introduced from the West, first and foremost, were modern firearms and gunboats. Several arsenals were established in the Yangtse valley and a dockyard at Mamoi, Foochow. A new army was trained in western style and a new navy with ships built abroad was constituted. Translations of foreign books on these subjects were very much in vogue. Students were sent abroad so that China would not forever be in need of foreign "advisers" to help build up her new national defence, and also that China might know western ways and how to deal with these foreign diplomats. Beyond that China had very little use for western culture.

China's defeat in 1894-95 at the hand of Japan caused the thinking Chinese to seek a more thorough and fundamental solution than just an introduction of western firearms and gunboats and an understanding of western diplomacy and international laws. But really the seeds for the reformist movement were already sprouting before the Sino-Japanese war. The early returned students were seeking something more fundamental than the *yang wu* statesmen wanted to see done. They worked under Li Hung-chang, and when Li lost favor with the court, these returned students turned their attention to translation of western books, aiming at the dissemination of the new knowledge. When the Sino-Japanese war came to an end, they used it as a concrete lesson to tell the public that there was a need of some fundamental reform. Japan was a constitu-

tional monarchy and China was not; otherwise the conditions in these two countries were pretty much the same. Was that, then, not a proof of the superiority of the constitutional government? And so the reformist movement gained popularity and even court favor. It flourished under the patronage of Emperor Kwang Shu, but proved to be a short-lived one as the Empress Dowager virtually imprisoned the emperor. While the reformists, virtual exiles abroad, were plotting to stage a comeback, another group of political reformers preached revolution and republicanism. In the winter of 1911-12, the latter group won the day, and the Chinese republic was established. Such was the hold of republican idea on the Chinese public that not even Yuan Shih-kai with all the army leaders as his supporters was able to make himself emperor, nor could the restoration of the "boy emperor" with the former Ching generals and soldiers around the capital last more than seven days.

But the Chinese officials and military were only paying lip services to the republic; civil wars were the orders of the day; and the people did not have any more voice in the government than under the Manchu regime. The intellectuals were anything but satisfied with things as they were. This dissatisfaction of the intellectuals crystallized into the May 4 movement when the Paris peace conference awarded Shantung to Japan instead of, as promised, returning it to China. But the movement had far more significance than merely voicing dissatisfaction of an international issue. The youth of the nation demanded a genuine democratic government so that the conditions of the country might be improved, both internally and internationally. Meanwhile Dr. Sun Yat-sen and his followers were carrying on their fight against the northern military for democracy. In the Kuomintang northern punitive expedition, these forces demanding a true republican government made a common cause and won the day. The May 4 movement also stood for a more thorough introduction of science and literature from the West.

Just as the Nanking government was slowly consolidating the country under its control, came the Japanese aggression. This time the slogan of national salvation is not firearms and battle ships, nor political reforms, nor yet a more thorough understanding of western science and literature, but national renaissance. The Chinese nation instinctively feels that all these previous prescriptions it had taken proved not as effective as they were first believed to be. The League of Nations has taught us that we must rely on ourselves and not on any help from outside. The national salvation is to come from the nation's "will to live." China in the last half-decade realizes that that she must pull through somehow or perish as a nation. This sentiment was first expressed in the rather vague term of national renaissance (民族復興), but lately a much more expressive phrase was coined. It is "rebirth by our own vitality" (自力更生). The will to live is certainly there, and we have not the least doubt that China will soon prove to the world that she is fit to survive.